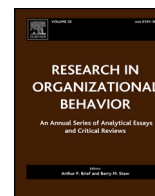




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Unjust punishment in organizations

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ABSTRACT

What causes leaders to punish subordinates unjustly? And why might leaders keep punishing subordinates unjustly, even when this increases workplace misconduct? In the current paper we address these questions by suggesting that power and status cause leaders to punish unjustly. We review evidence on the effects of power and status on punishment, review how unjust punishments foster misconduct, and highlight how this creates a self-perpetuating feedback loop—leaders are more likely to punish in an unjust manner when subordinates engage in misconduct, but subordinates' misconduct is partly caused by unjust punishments. We also discuss how leader-subordinate distrust may be at the heart of this phenomenon and how organizations may counteract unjust punishments. We draw attention to research areas that have received little attention and draw up an agenda for future research. Taken together, we integrate the literatures on power, status, punishment and trust, review evidence on when unjust punishments become perpetuating, challenge research suggesting that leaders are cautious when punishing, and guide future research on the topic of punishment in organizations.

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Introduction

Leaders frequently punish subordinates with verbal reprimands, exclusion from high-status work teams, or bonus-cuts (Butterfield, Treviño, & Ball, 1996; Butterfield, Treviño, & Wade, 2005; Kirchler, Kogler, & Muehlbacher, 2014). Managers at Wells Fargo, for instance, punished employees that failed to reach their sales-target in an attempt to make them more productive (Gobry, 2016). Yet, punishments can be perceived as unjust by subordinates and foster negative attitudes, counterproductive and unethical behaviors, or even revenge tactics (e.g., Ball, Treviño, & Sims, 1994; Gneezy & Rustichini, 2000; Treviño, 1992; Van Dijk, Mulder, & De Kwaadsteniet, 2014). Steve Job, for instance, publicly reprimanded and fired his employees for minor forms of misconduct, thereby creating a hostile workplace climate (Parker, 2015). The Dutch ministry of justice allegedly suffered from a workplace culture where bosses severely punished their subordinates for small transgressions and where punishment justifications fell short of what was expected by subordinates (e.g., subordinates were always blamed; Voskuil, 2017). What causes leaders to punish unjustly and provide inadequate justifications for their punishments? And why might leaders keep punishing subordinates unjustly, even when it increases workplace misconduct?

Management theory and research on organizational punishment has focused on the consequences of leaders' punishments for subordinates' attitudes, motivations, and behaviors (e.g., Arvey & Ivancevich, 1980; Ball, Treviño, & Sims, 1994; Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1994; Treviño, 1992), suggesting that subordinates' perception of a punishment as just is a key predictor of cooperative behaviors in the workplace as well as positive attitudes towards leaders (Ball et al., 1994; Cohen-Charash, & Spector, 2001; Tyler & Lind, 2001). In this paper, we integrate these findings within a broader framework, taking into account the psychology behind leaders' punishments and outlining how both leaders and subordinates contribute to the perpetuation of unjust punishments in organizations. We focus on four phenomena: (a) the impact of leaders' power and status on their punishments, (b) the process by which punishments are perceived as unjust by subordinates, (c) subordinates' reactions to unjust punishments, and (d) the impact of subordinates' responses on leaders' punishments. We suggest that leaders are at risk of using punishments perceived as unjust by subordinates and that unjust punishments can easily become self-perpetuating, thereby increasing misconduct.

In doing so, we connect and integrate the literatures on power, status, punishment, trust, and justice, review evidence on when unjust punishments perpetuate, challenge the notion that leaders are cautious when punishing, and guide future research on the topic of punishment in organizations. This paper is not intended to be a complete survey of the literature on punishment, but instead a thought-provoking portrait on how power and status differences cause leaders to punish in a way perceived as unjust by subordinates. Indeed, the scientific literature currently lacks a coherent framework that integrates the determinants (e.g., power, status), processes (e.g., trust) and consequences (e.g., misconduct) of organizational punishment. We address this gap by critiquing previous studies, organizing existing studies, identifying important variables, and suggesting directions for future research.

Our analysis holds timely implications for leaders' ability to promote positive outcomes in organizations. For instance, after their corporate scandal involving the creation of fake accounts, Wells Fargo & Co. created the office of Ethics, Oversight, and Integrity, and hired rule-compliance officers tasked with promoting cooperation through providing punishment (see also Treviño, Den Nieuwenboer, Kreiner, & Bishop, 2014; and see Scholten & Ellemers, 2016 for an analysis of costly misconduct by traders at financial banks). Importantly, the effective use of punishments can prevent misconduct, whereas the ineffective use of punishments can promote more unethical behavior and misconduct (e.g., Balliet, Mulder, & Van Lange, 2011; Mulder, De Cremer, Van Dijk, & Wilke, 2006). Understanding how organizations can improve their use of—and communication about—punishments to promote justice and ethics in the workplace may be vital for an organization's long-term successful performance (Karpoff, Lee, & Martin, 2008). In sum, an integrated understanding of leaders' punishments is prudent.

What makes a punishment just or unjust?

Punishment severity and punishment goals

To understand when leaders punish unjustly in the eyes of subordinates, we first need to understand what subordinates consider an unjust punishment. In other words, what do subordinates desire in a punishment? Punishments are typically

classified into two categories: punishments that aim to give people their just deserts (i.e., deserved punishment; Darley, 2009; Kant, 1780/1952; Kant, 1780/1952; Robinson, 2005) and punishments that have a different aim such as deterring and preventing people from future misconduct (this also includes the aim to incapacitate an offender; Bentham, 1789/1988; Bentham, 1789/1988; Carlsmith et al., 2002; Hobbes, 1651/1996; Kirchler et al., 2014; Nagin, 1998). Although these punishment goals may co-occur, they have different purposes. A just-deserts oriented punishment aims to punish past rule-breakers proportionally (i.e., achieve balance between misconduct and punishment), regardless of the punishment's ability to deter future misconduct. A just-deserts goal is thus retroactive rather than prospective. Having this just-deserts goal, punishers should be primarily concerned with achieving a sense of fairness and justice through punishing people proportionately, rather than preventing future misconduct. This approach is generally associated with moral philosopher Immanuel Kant (1780/1952) (Kant (1780/1952), who argued that “punishment can never be administered merely as a means to promoting another good” and that “punishment should be pronounced over all criminals proportionate to their internal wickedness” (p. 397). In contrast, a deterrence goal is prospective rather than retroactive. Having this deterrence goal, punishers should be primarily concerned with deterring future misconduct instead of achieving a sense of justice through punishing (past) rule breakers proportionately. This approach is most often associated with legal philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1789/1988) (Bentham (1789/1988), who argued that “general prevention ought to be the chief end of punishment, as its real justification” (p. 396).

The punishment-goal distinction maps onto the philosophical notions of deontology and consequentialism. The just-deserts goal for punishment can be considered a deontological goal, as punishment is morally obligatory and self-justified, regardless of future consequences. Punishment is an end in itself, a “categorical imperative” (Kant, 1780/1952) (Kant, 1780/1952), which means that punishment is mandated when misconduct takes place. The severity of deontological punishment depends on the moral blameworthiness of an offender. Punishment is meant to restore a moral balance where people who engage in wrong behaviors are punished proportionately (e.g., thus achieving fairness and justice; Cottingham, 1979; Packer, 1968). The intent of the offender and the extenuating circumstances surrounding misconduct are thus crucial in determining how severe the punishment should be (as this determines how “deserving” an offender is; Carlsmith et al., 2002). In contrast, a deterrence aim for punishment can be considered a consequentialist goal, as punishment is focused on the potential consequences of a punishment for an organization or society (Beccaria, 1764/1986) (Beccaria, 1764/1986). Consequentialist punishment centers on controlling and deterring future behavior from all potential rule breakers and is sensitive to the perceived potential and importance of future rule breaking (Carlsmith et al., 2002). In this paper, we focus on just deserts and use deterrence as a contrast to show when and why leaders punish unjustly.

A large body of research in the psychological and legal literature suggests that people who do not occupy leadership positions tend to view punishment as a means to give rule breakers their just deserts instead of as a means to deter misconduct from potential rule breakers (e.g., Aharoni & Fridlund, 2011; Carlsmith, 2006; Carlsmith, Darley, & Robinson, 2002; Crockett, Ozdemir, & Fehr,

2014; Darley, 2009; Keller, Oswald, Stucki, & Gollwitzer, 2010; Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004; Gerber & Jackson, 2013; Gromet, Okimoto, Wenzel, & Darley, 2012; Mooijman, van Dijk, Ellemers, & van Dijk, 2015; Okimoto & Wenzel, 2011; Robinson, 2005; Rucker, Polifroni, & Rucker, 2004; Vidmar & Miller, 1980). For instance, low-ranking subordinates report preferring just deserts over deterrence as the main societal punishment goal, whereas high-ranking managers report preferring deterrence to just deserts (Mooijman et al., 2015, Study 3a). Similarly, findings from experimental studies show that people who are not leaders prefer using punishments to give rule breakers their just deserts rather than deterring them from further misconduct (Keller et al., 2010; Mooijman et al., 2015).

In addition, participants in lab experiments desire a rule breaker to be punished even when this rule breaker can never break the rules again (Crockett et al., 2014). When assigning punishments to criminals in experimental settings, participants are sensitive to factors that are relevant for just-deserts theory (e.g., extenuating circumstances that mitigate the blameworthiness of the offender) while being insensitive to the factors that are relevant for the deterrence of misconduct (e.g., the publicity of the punishment which is assumed to deter; Carlsmith et al., 2002, see also Darley, Carlsmith, & Robinson, 2000). Participants in lab experiments also tend to be relatively uninterested in information about a rule breaker's potential to engage in future misconduct (e.g., past crimes; Carlsmith, 2006) and persist in punishing a rule breaker even when there are no deterrence effects on the larger populace (e.g., general deterrence; Aharoni & Fridlund, 2011). Seeing rule breakers get their just deserts tends to be satisfying (de Quervain et al., 2004) and just deserts can be distinguished from revenge, which can decrease satisfaction (Carlsmith, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2008) and revolves around the desire to make offenders suffer (often disproportionately; see Gerber & Jackson, 2013 for empirical evidence of the distinction between just deserts and revenge; see also Rai, Valdesolo, & Graham, 2017). Instead of wanting the offender to suffer disproportionately, just deserts aims to achieve proportionality between a rule-breaking act and punishment. A just punishment, in other words, achieves a balance between the severity of the misconduct and the severity of the punishment.

When punishments deviate from this balance by being too harsh or too soft (e.g., when the punishment does not fit the crime; Ball et al., 1994; Vidmar & Miller, 1980) or by not taking into account the just-deserts principles that we mentioned earlier (e.g., intent of the offender and extenuating circumstances surrounding misconduct; Carlsmith et al., 2002), the punishment is perceived as unjust (Vidmar & Miller, 1980). This means that punishments can be perceived as unjust for two distinct reasons: because of its consequence and/or because of the decision-making process that preceded it. First, people can perceive a punishment as unjust because it is too harsh or too soft. A manager that fires a subordinate for a minor transgression or does not fire a subordinate even when this subordinate engages in gross misconduct may create a sense of injustice because the punishment is perceived as not proportionate. Second, people can perceive a punishment as unjust because the decision-making process is perceived as not taking into account just-deserts relevant principles. A manager who justifies a punishment as a means to deter rule breaking from all subordinates may create feelings of injustice, as this decision implies that the manager did not take into account the principle that punishment should be based on the intent of the (potential) offenders (Mooijman, van Dijk, van Dijk, & Ellemers, 2017).

Punishment target versus third-parties

Perceiving a punishment as unjust may occur not only when subordinates are punished too severely, but also when they gain knowledge about the too severe or too soft punishment of other

subordinates. Thus, punishments have far-reaching “ripple” effects (Treviño, 1992): through direct observance, indirect communication, or gossip, people learn about misconduct and punishment decisions. The effects of punishment include both the effects on the punished target as well as observational, vicarious effects of punishments on subordinates that were not initially punished by the leader. Because most subordinates are third-parties who do not always directly observe the punishment, information is often limited and subordinates may rely on the punished subordinate or the leader for information about the punishment. Punishment justifications are therefore important (Bies, Shapiro, & Cummings, 1988). A leader who punishes in an unjust manner may face a number of obstacles in justifying this punishment. First, the unjust punishment may simply be observed by others and any attempt by the leader to justify the punishment as just/fair may be perceived as inappropriate, hypocritical, and insincere (Tyler, 2006). Second, when the punishment is not observed and information is limited, the leader's justification may compete with the explanation from the punished subordinate. When the subordinate is fired or seen as an outcast by third-parties, the leader's explanation is likely to prevail. Yet, when the punished subordinate is not fired and able to provide a competing explanation for the event (e.g., the punishment was disproportionate and unfair), a leader's justification that does not address justice (for instance, by emphasizing that the punishment was meant to deter others from misconduct) might be perceived as inappropriate and insincere. We will go into more detail about punishment justifications in Sections “Power and punishment justifications” and “Status and punishment justifications”.

It seems plausible that punishment information and justifications are particularly important for third-parties as they generally have less information about misconduct and are eager to find out what happened. There are probably a plethora of factors that moderate the degree to which third-parties believe the punished subordinate over the leader or vice versa (e.g., identification with the punished target versus leader). The aim of the current paper is not to provide an exhaustive list of factors that contribute to subordinates perceiving punishments as unjust. Instead, we highlight when leaders punish in ways that are perceived as unjust by both the punished subordinate and third-party subordinates. We draw attention to how leaders punish, the justifications they provide, and how this contributes to the perpetuation of unjust punishments. In the next section, we focus on power and status as two sources of leaders' unjust punishment behavior.

Punishment in organizations: power and status

Organizations are typically structured hierarchically. Hierarchy can be defined as the vertical ranking of individuals along one or more socially valued dimensions (Anderson & Brown, 2010; Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Parsons, 1940). Much attention has been given to different dimensions of hierarchies (e.g., Adams, 1953; Benoit-Smullyan, 1944; Bernstein, 1981), with research converging on power and status as two important and distinguishable dimensions by which people can be ranked (Anicich, Fast, Halevy, & Galinsky, 2015; Blader & Chen, 2012; Bunderson & Reagon, 2011; Fiske, 2010; Hays & Bendersky, 2015). Power is typically defined as asymmetric control over critical resources (Fiske, 1993; Guinote, 2007) such as control over salaries, organizational budgets, or unique information. Status does not involve control over critical resources and is typically defined as being respected and admired by others (Fiske, 2010; Magee & Galinsky, 2008).

Power distinguishes leaders from subordinates in organizations (e.g., leaders control subordinates' salary, bonuses, and vacation

times; Anderson & Brown, 2012; Pfeffer, 1992). That is, leaders who implement punishments have, by definition, a form of structural power that is imbedded in their role—they objectively possess and can allocate resources that are valued by subordinates and that can be used to punish (e.g., decrease subordinates' bonus money; see Lawler, 1973, (p. 7) on the "essence of supervision"; and Keltner, Anderson & Gruenfeld, 2003; Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Tost, 2015). Punishment in an organization can be defined as a leader's application of a negative consequence or the withdrawal of a positive consequence from someone under his or her supervision (Treviño, 1992). Organizational punishments can constitute verbal reprimands, suspensions, terminations, withholding social interaction, exclusion of membership of high-status groups, or loss of a pay raise/bonus in response to misconduct such as theft, lying, drug or alcohol abuse, insubordination, or low productivity. Misconduct can as such be defined as behavior that deviates from organizational informal norms and formal rules and policies.

Although punishing requires a leader to have control over resources, power is distinct from influence, which involves obtaining compliance with a request (Anderson & Brion, 2014; Cialdini & Goldstein 2004). That is, power affords the ability to punish, but punishment does not necessarily lead to compliance, as punishment can promote positive or negative outcomes depending on how just the punishment is perceived to be (Mooijman et al., 2017; van Dijk, Mulder, & De Kwaadsteniet, 2014). For instance, the power to punish subordinates can be aimed at promoting cooperation but in fact do the opposite (Mulder et al., 2006). Power thus entails potential influence, as influence is a possible consequence of having control over critical resources. Besides influence, power can also be distinguished from status. Although having status sometimes leads individuals to gain control over resources (French & Raven, 1959; Turner, 2005), status can be defined as the extent to which one is respected and admired by others (Anderson, Hildreth, & Howlan, 2015; Blader & Chen, 2012; Lount & Pettit, 2012) and is therefore not a strict requirement for organizational punishment to occur. Leaders typically have status but some individuals who occupy managerial roles have the power to punish others but are not very respected (e.g., individuals in more bureaucratic roles; Anicich et al., 2015). Similar to power, status is distinct from social influence, since influence tends to be a consequence of status. This is important for distinguishing power and status, as having influence over subordinates otherwise implies that a leader has both status and power. Because status is rooted in what subordinates think about leaders, status is dependent on how leaders treat subordinates and can thus change relatively easily between situations and over time (Blader & Chen, 2012; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Power, in contrast, is a more necessary and stable aspect of a punisher's position in the organizational hierarchy (Anderson & Brion, 2014).

Understanding the causes of punishment in the organizational context thus requires focusing on how power impacts the punisher (e.g., organizational leaders). Understanding the effects of having structural power, and the experience of power that accompanies it (e.g., feeling powerful; Galinsky, Magee, & Gruenfeld, 2003; Tost, 2015), is crucial because having power can have transformative effects on individuals (Anderson & Brion, 2014). For instance, having power and feeling powerful can increase the objectification of others (Fiske, 1993; Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008), perceptions of others as incompetent and untrustworthy (Inesi, Gruenfeld, & Galinsky, 2012; Kipnis, Castell, Gergen, & Mauch, 1976; Mooijman et al., 2015), risk-seeking behavior (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006), and other disinhibited behaviors (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008; Hirsh, Galinsky, & Zhong, 2011). Since the act of punishment is also an explicit display of a leader's power over the offender (Vidmar & Miller, 1980), power is a salient construct to leaders who impose

punishments on subordinates. That said, in the current paper we will also focus on the role of status, since leaders' punishments also affect how respected and admired they are by subordinates (i.e., unjust punishments can reduce the degree to which leaders are respected and admired) and having or lacking status can have transformative effects on individuals (Fiske, 2010). For instance, feeling respected and admired can increase perspective taking (Blader, Shirako, & Chen, 2016) and foster resource sharing (Blader & Chen, 2012), whereas feeling disrespected can decrease positive attitudes and undermine the willingness to cooperate (Mooijman et al., 2017; Tyler, 2006).

If power/status affects punishment, then leaders' punishments might be at risk of misaligning with the punishment preferences of those who have less power such as subordinates. This misalignment may cause leaders to punish in ways perceived as unjust by subordinates. Here, we address this possibility by highlighting how power and status change punishment preferences and increase reliance on unjust punishment. We also highlight how this phenomenon may become self-perpetuating, as reactions to unjust punishment evoke more unjust punishment through challenging a leader's power and undermining his or her status.

Power, status, punishment

Power, punishment severity, and punishment goals

Qualitative research on managerial punishments suggests that leaders view organizational punishment as a highly emotionally charged event—managers indicate that they try to limit the negative consequences of punishments (Butterfield et al., 1996; Butterfield et al., 2005) and some see having to punish subordinates as a failure on their part (Casey, 1997). Although this research provides valuable insights into the explicit thought-processes of managers who are faced with a punishment decision, most punishment decisions are intuitive and subject to factors that lie outside of conscious awareness (Carlsmith, 2006; Yudkin, Rothmund, Twadawski, Thalla, & Van Bavel, 2016). What leaders say when interviewed may differ from how they end up punishing misconduct. The conclusion that leaders try to limit the negative consequences of punishment, take into account the desires of subordinates in the workplace, and err on the side of caution may thus be premature. Recent findings on the effects of power on punishment suggest that the power that leaders have over subordinates may affect their punishment decisions, increasing the chance that they punish in an unjust manner. Almost two decades of research on the effects of power suggests that having power intensifies goal-related approach motivation (Galinsky et al., 2003; Guinote, 2017; Keltner et al., 2003; Magee & Smith, 2013). For instance, having more power than others makes personal goals of gaining and maintaining power more cognitively accessible (Guinote, 2017; Slabu & Guinote, 2010; Yukl, Gordon, & Taber, 2002), increases selfish behavior in tasks that highlight personal gains (Galinsky et al., 2003; DeCelles, DeRue, Margolis, & Ceranic, 2012), increases delayed gratification to gain future rewards (Joshi & Fast, 2013), and increases risk-taking (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Inesi, 2010).

Crucially, leaders tend to be responsible for maintaining norms and rules within an organization and, as such, have the goal of keeping social control (De Wit, Scheepers, Ellemers, Sassenberg, & Scholl, 2017; Fiske, 1993; Lammers & Stapel, 2009; Lawler, 1973; Pfeffer, 1992; Sassenberg et al., 2012). Without effectively controlling subordinates, leaders are unable to maintain prevailing rules and unable to direct their subordinates to work toward collective goals (e.g., team goals). This suggests that having power makes it hard for leaders to err on the side of caution when punishing, as misconduct challenges leaders' social control and

authority. Punishing harshly is one way of reestablishing control and forcing subordinates to respect the authority of the leader (e.g., not punishing misconduct harshly may be perceived as creating “wiggle room” for subordinates to engage in more misconduct; Vidmar & Miller, 1980). Consistent with this logic, research on the effects of power on punishment demonstrates that those in power punish others more harshly—and demand more severe punishment when they can't punish the perpetrator themselves—compared to less powerful individuals (Kraus & Keltner, 2013; Lammers & Stapel, 2009; Van Prooijen, Coffeng, & Vermeer, 2014; Wiltermuth & Flynn, 2013). Rather than trying to limit the negative consequences of punishment, as would be expected when power makes leaders perceive punishment as a failure on their part (e.g., Butterfield et al., 1996; Butterfield et al., 2005), power induces leaders to punish subordinates more severely, consistent with the notion that misconduct challenges leaders' social control.

Further extending the logic on punishment reaffirming a leader's social control, research suggests that power directly misaligns the punishment goals of leaders and subordinates. Although leaders still care about giving rule breakers their just deserts, power makes them more concerned about the overall deterrence effects of punishment (Mooijman et al., 2015). For instance, in a recent study 62% of surveyed managers indicated that the main aim of punishment should be to deter misconduct, whereas only 46% of subordinates agreed (Mooijman et al., 2015; Study 3a). This preference for deterrence was explained by managers experiencing more power than subordinates. Experimentally inducing individuals to feel powerful also increases the degree to which they endorse punishments that are aimed at deterring misconduct, an effect that has been replicated in a wide variety of samples (Mooijman et al., 2015). Rather than exclusively punishing individual rule breakers for their misconduct, power seems to make leaders focused on deterring potential rule breakers. This does not mean that high-power leaders always punish more severely than subordinates desire. There is no theoretical basis for assuming that relying on deterrence is always associated with stronger punishments than just deserts. When the potential to deter is low but misconduct is severe, relying on deterrence (compared to just deserts) as a punishment motive might result in a preference for weaker punishments (because there is less potential to deter with the punishment). This suggests that power can also increase reliance on punishments that are seen as too soft by subordinates, although research has not yet demonstrated this.

Future research could investigate if power makes the severity of leaders' punishments depend on whether misconduct is easily detectable in the workplace. Deterrence is harder when the likelihood of detecting misconduct is low. Misconduct with a low chance of detection should incur more severe punishments if employees are to be deterred (e.g., stealing office supplies), whereas misconduct that is almost always detected should incur a less severe punishment since there is less need for the punishment to deter (e.g., coming late to work; Carlsmith et al., 2002). In addition, from the perspective of deterrence theory, public punishments are particularly useful because public punishments have a greater potential than private punishments in deterring misconduct (Carlsmith et al., 2002; Jabour, 2013; Martinez, 2015; Nagin, 1998). However, the use of public punishment can create situations where subordinates are publicly embarrassed and stigmatized, which is often perceived as cruel and harsh (Robinson, 2005). In fact, people's awareness of leaders trying to deter misconduct contributes directly to the perception that this leader punishes unjustly (Mooijman et al., 2017). Thus, power seems to make leaders punish in a harsh and cruel manner. At the same time, the current theorizing also suggests that leaders can sometimes punish too softly. When punishment takes place in

private and misconduct is easily detectable, leaders may punish less harshly than subordinates prefer.

Punishing to restore power

The link between power and punishment also depends on whether leaders perceive their power as waning. Leaders are likely to be concerned about power loss when they perceive the power hierarchy as unstable since the stability of a power hierarchy is an important determinant of potential power loss (Jordan, Sivathan, & Galinsky, 2011). Leaders such as managers can experience feelings of instability with regard to their own position (e.g., likely to be fired or demoted) and with regard to the organizational resources they control (e.g., fluctuating and changing budgets). Leaders can also experience stability, such that leaders feel secure in their position (e.g., unlikely to be fired or demoted) and the organizational resources that they control (e.g., secure budgets). Previous research has suggested that unstable power can increase (or decrease) risk-taking and increase a sense of threat (Jordan et al., 2011; Maner et al., 2007; Scheepers et al., 2015). Similarly, punishments may be affected by leaders' concern that their power is waning. When leaders' power is unstable, they may increasingly rely on severe punishments to keep their control over subordinates and shore up their waning power.

Punishment can serve to reaffirm a leader's control over others, as punishment can consolidate the degree to which leaders keep control over valuable resources and prevent them from losing their power position (their position depends on keeping a team or department function productively, without too much misconduct). The current analysis suggests that organizational practices such as repositioning managers from one department to another (Amabile & Conti, 1999) may increase leaders' reliance on unjust punishments through fostering their fear for losing power. In addition, future research could investigate how being confronted with misconduct changes leaders' perceptions of their own power. That is, when misconduct is isolated and (the potential for misconduct) not widespread, leaders may perceive their ability to hold on to power to be relatively unaffected. When misconduct is perceived to be widespread, or the potential for misconduct to spread amongst subordinates is high, leaders may perceive their ability to hold on to power to be under threat, which fosters reliance on severe punishments aimed at deterring misconduct. Lastly, certain types of misconduct (e.g., taking home office supplies and slacking off at work) may be more likely to be perceived as having a high potential to spread amongst subordinates than other types of misconduct (e.g., embezzling company funds and other forms of financial fraud), which may affect how much power threat leaders experience and how unjust their subsequent punishments are.

Power and punishment justifications

High-power leaders feel pressured to provide justifications for their punishment decisions, as actors in organizations typically desire an explicit reason for punishment. Punishment justifications may be particularly important for third-party subordinates, who's lack of information about the event can lead them to desire or even demand information from the leader. For instance, punishment can be accompanied by justifications in terms of ethical standards as well as self-interested rationality (e.g., employees failed company standards and had a bad effect on the firm; Kreps & Monin, 2011). Some examples of leaders that provide punishment justifications are judges that sentence people to prison with the explicit justification that this is meant to deter future rule-breaking behavior (e.g., see Martinez, 2015), US president Barack Obama who justified the killing of Osama Bin Laden as an act of justice, and politicians that explicitly justify their

naming-and-shaming policies as attempts to deter crime (e.g., see Langlois, 2012). Similarly, managers' punishment justifications could be moral or pragmatic justifications. A moral justification links misconduct and resulting punishment explicitly to moral concerns such as justice, whereas a pragmatic justification links it to the consequences associated with misconduct and the deterrence of rule-breaking acts (e.g., if I tolerate it now, everyone will engage in misconduct; Lammers & Stapel, 2009).

Given our theorizing on the role of power, power may make leaders less likely to provide a punishment justification (because power makes leaders less concerned about what others think of them; Guinote, 2017). When powerful leaders provide a punishment justification, however, they may be more likely to use pragmatic justifications because these are more in line with their thinking. Power tends to focus attention on personal goals such as maintaining power, which is primarily reflected in the productivity, stability, and financial health of an organization. Power may therefore foster the degree to which leaders justify their punishment decisions in terms of the shortcomings of subordinates (e.g., the incompetence of subordinates instead of the incompetence of the leader), the precedent it might set for others in case the leader does not punish (e.g., if I don't punish this subordinate, everyone will engage in misconduct), and the degree to which it will help the productivity and financial health of the department (e.g., misconduct is bad for business and creates negative PR for the firm). Managers may thus communicate to subordinates that the public reprimand, bonus-cut, or firing of an employee was necessary from a pragmatic point of view and done in the hope of preventing subordinates from engaging in similar behavior. This "sending-a-message" approach to punishment may be particularly prominent amongst managers who feel that their control over their team or department is slipping and who believe that a negative example has to be set.

Yet, the pragmatic justification given by the leader may compete with the potential moral justification given by the punished subordinate (e.g., the punishment is unfair). Indeed, if unjust punishment is observed by third-parties, the pragmatic justification given by the leader might decrease whether the leader is perceived as sincere and fair. Leaders may try to combat this by justifying their punishments strategically. Leaders may punish a subordinate severely while trying to downplay the significance of the event to third-party subordinates (and emphasize that the punishment was fair and just). Of course, this is predicated on the notion that leaders are at least somewhat aware of what third-party subordinates desire. Future research could investigate whether leaders use their punishment justifications strategically (e.g., justify punishments as achieving justice) to counteract the negative effects of punishments and whether a mismatch between leaders' punishment motivations as perceived by subordinates (e.g., deterrence) and the actual punishment justification given by the leader (e.g., just deserts) affect subordinates' perceptions of punishment justice.

Status, punishment severity, and punishment goals

Although research on the effect of status on punishment behavior is scarce, it seems plausible that leader status impacts punishment behavior. Status may do so in two ways. First, it may act as a buffer and attenuate the link between power and punishment severity. Feeling respected and admired tends to draw an individual's attention outward toward the desires of others, increasing a leaders' realization that subordinates are sensitive to the treatment they receive (Blader et al., 2016; Lount & Pettit, 2012). In contrast, power often draws a leader's attention inwards toward personal goals (Galinsky et al., 2008; Guinote, 2017), with concerns about personal power gain and potential

power loss weighing heavier than subordinates' desires (Blader & Chen, 2012). Consistent with the possibility that status attenuates the power-punishment link, power has been shown to decrease just behaviors (e.g., sharing resources with others, pro-social acts), whereas status has been shown to increase just behaviors (Blader & Chen, 2012). A study by Foulk et al. (2018) demonstrates that managers in organizations perceive more incivility from subordinates, and act more abusively, on days where they experience psychological power. In contrast, leaders that feel respected by others are more willing to share their resources with others, are motivated to achieve justice in the workplace, and view the world from other people's perspectives (Blader & Yu, 2017; Li, Chen, & Blader, 2016). This implies that high-status leaders use punishments to give subordinates their just deserts (as subordinates generally want them to; Darley, 2009) instead of providing harsh punishments that deter (Blader et al., 2016). Of course, this implies some level of awareness on the part of the leader such that they understand what subordinates' desire. It seems plausible to assume that leaders aim to understand subordinates and maintain their status by trying to achieve justice in the workplace instead of controlling-and-detering subordinates—being controlled by others is resented by most individuals (Lammers, Stoker, Rink, & Galinsky, 2016).

Specifically, high-status leaders may be sensitive to factors that are relevant for just-deserts theory such as extenuating circumstances surrounding misconduct and the degree to which misconduct is harmful to others (Carlsmith et al., 2002). That is, a subordinate who steals organizational resources to buy a new car will be punished more harshly by a high-status leader than a subordinate who embezzles the same amount for the relatively noble purpose of helping unemployed and disadvantaged members of society (someone who is concerned about deterrence should be less sensitive to these differences, as the primary concern is to prevent subordinates from embezzling funds in the first place). In addition, misconduct that is more severe (e.g., stealing \$1000 versus \$100) should incur more punishment especially from high-status leaders. The rationale for this is that just-deserts centers on the deservingness of the offender—subordinates that engage in misconduct that is less severe or have mitigating circumstances can expect punishment that is less severe in particular from high-status leaders (high-power leaders may be less sensitive to these factors compared to high-status leaders, as misconduct still needs to be deterred from third-party subordinates). This suggests that status acts as a buffer and attenuates the link between power and punishment severity.

Punishing to restore status

Alternatively, status may strengthen the degree to which power increases punishment severity, as misconduct may be perceived as challenging a leader's status. Part of the "social contract" between leaders and followers is the notion that leaders direct collective action and do not abuse their power while subordinates follow instructions and stick to the rules (Plato 380 BC/1992; Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007). The degree to which a leader feels respected, then, can be operationalized as subordinates following the rules that are set by the leader. Misconduct challenges the notion that leaders are respected by their subordinates, as leaders' feelings of being respected are determined by the degree to which subordinates successfully follow the instructions. Subordinates that shirk the rules signal that they do not accept the authority of the leader and do not respect him or her enough to comply. Salient examples of this can be seen in depictions of powerful mafia bosses who construe rule-breaking acts as deeply disrespectful and requiring a forceful punishing response. This line of reasoning raises a second possibility.

Misconduct might foster more severe punishment through lowering leaders' subjective sense of status.

To our knowledge, no research to date has investigated how status impacts punishment. We believe this to be an interesting avenue for future research. The degree to which misconduct is construed by a leader as disrespectful (thus decreasing a leader's status) may play an important role in whether status attenuates the negative effects of power. When the ability to punish misconduct is perceived as a position that commands respect, status could counteract the impact of power. Instead, when misconduct is construed as disrespectful to the leader, status may not foster reliance on just deserts (e.g., Blader & Chen, 2011; Fast & Chen, 2009). Taken together, although the impact of status on punishment should be studied further, our analysis provides two opposing predictions.

Status and punishment justifications

Status may make leaders more likely to provide a justification for punishment (as high-status leaders tend to be concerned about what subordinates think about them) and provide justifications that revolve around justice. Even when leaders punish severely to shore up their waning respect, they may justify such decisions in terms of justice because this is what they believe subordinates desire. Thus, the actual punishment that is given can have a different function than the justification that is given. A leader can punish severely to deter or increase respect while emphasizing that the punishment is aimed at establishing justice. What justifications leaders provide may depend on the audience that leaders are paying attention to. Management or stake holders may demand a pragmatic and self-interested justification for why others are punished, whereas subordinates may be more interested in how punishment creates a just working environment for them. Future research could study how punishment motivations and punishment justifications diverge, with leaders punishing for one reason (e.g., deterrence, keeping power) while providing an alternative justification (e.g., justice, company's productivity), thus using their justifications in a strategic manner. Both power and status may play a role, potentially decreasing or increasing the motivation to take others' concerns into account. For instance, power can increase concerns about what other power-holders such as managers think about punishments (e.g., increasing pragmatic punishment justifications; Lammers & Stapel, 2009; Lammers & Yang, 2012), whereas status may increase the degree to which leaders also care about the concerns of non-power holders such as subordinates (e.g., increasing moral justifications; Blader & Chen, 2012).

Summary

Leaders' power and status affect how they punish. Having high-power while feeling disrespected misaligns the punishments of leaders with the punishment preferences of subordinates. We suggest that this happens because leaders punish too harshly, too softly, or because they provide inadequate justifications for their punishments. Future research could investigate how leaders use punishment justifications strategically to frame their punishment differently (e.g., just deserts) than their original motivation for the punishment (e.g., deterrence) in an attempt to make punishments seem more just.

Integrating the determinants and consequences of unjust punishments

So far, we have focused on how power and status affect punishment severity, goals, and justifications. We now focus on the process that connects power and status to the consequences of unjust punishments. A large body of scientific work has demonstrated that injustice

has a wide range of negative effects. Subordinates who perceive their workplace to be unjust tend to express more negative attitudes, feel more stressed, experience more conflict in the workplace, are less likely to cooperate with managers, take revenge on those who they perceive as engaging in unjust behavior, and engage in more misconduct (e.g., Ball, Treviño, & Sims, 1994; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Mooijman et al., 2017; Treviño, 1992; Tyler, 1990). We will not elaborate on these well-documented findings. Instead, we suggest that a lack of trust connects the determinants of unjust punishments (e.g., power and status) to its consequences. In doing so, we integrate the determinants and consequences of unjust punishment and suggest novel directions for future research.

Leaders' distrust towards subordinates

We suggest that power and status hierarchies tend to foster unjust punishments through decreasing leaders' trust in their subordinates, in particular when leaders experience high-levels of power and low-levels of status. Trust can be defined as an expectation of others' benign intentions, increasing the willingness to be vulnerable to these others' actions (Kramer, 1999; Zand, 1997). When leaders trust subordinates, they expect subordinates to follow their instructions, comply with organizational rules, and take the leader's interests into account. Consequently, leaders are more willing to be vulnerable to subordinates' actions, punish less severely or not at all, and give subordinates the benefit of the doubt. Leader trust in subordinates is thus an important factor underlying punishment behavior. When leaders do not trust subordinates, they tend to punish more severely and rely on deterrence as a strategy for promoting compliance (Mooijman et al., 2015). Interestingly, research suggests that power makes leaders distrust subordinates such that giving individuals power (e.g., in a negotiation context) makes them less likely to place their trust in others (Kramer & Gavrieli, 2004; Inesi et al., 2012; Mooijman et al., 2015; Schilke, Reimann, & Cook, 2015).

In contrast, high-status leaders tend to trust subordinates. Lount and Pettit (2012) show that high status (e.g., having a title or feeling respected) leads individuals to trust others more. This suggests that status makes leaders rely less on harsh punishments aimed at deterrence—a proposition consistent with the current theorizing. Trust may similarly impact the type of punishment justifications given by leaders. Trusting leaders may provide justifications aimed at giving subordinates what they desire (e.g., fairness and justice) and distrusting leaders may provide justifications aimed at sending a message to potential offenders. Yet, as we observed earlier, whether a leader's status keeps fostering trust in subordinates may depend on the misconduct that leaders observe. Trust is based on the expectation that subordinates stick to rules and refrain from misconduct. Observing misconduct may therefore significantly decrease high-status leaders' trust in subordinates, in part through decreasing how respected leaders feel. Thus, although status may initially foster trust in the absence of misconduct, this phenomenon may short-lived and dissolve into distrust as soon as subordinates engage in misconduct. This suggests that power and status hierarchies tend to foster unjust punishments through decreasing leaders' trust in their subordinates. Importantly, the low levels of trust that underlie unjust punishments may "leak over" to subordinates and influence how trusted they feel, as detailed next.

Subordinates feeling distrusted by their leader

Subordinates try to be accurate in their beliefs about whether their leaders trust them and use salient information and knowledge to accurately update their beliefs about them. That is, research has shown that lacking power and status tends to

orient attention upward in hierarchies, such that subordinates pay more attention to leaders, are better able to recall their behaviors, intentions, and feelings, and are more influenced by them than vice versa (see Fiske, 2010 for an overview). A severe and unjust punishment signals that a leader does not trust subordinates to engage in appropriate behavior, which makes both the punished subordinate as well as third-party subordinates feel distrusted by their leader. Punishment justifications that focus on “sending a message” to all subordinates (e.g., “If I don’t punish, everyone might engage in misconduct) might also be harmful for trust development, as such justifications signal to third-party subordinates that the leader expects them to engage in misconduct in the absence of punishments. In contrast, just punishments—and justifications that are focused on creating a just workplace—are less likely to make third-party subordinates feel distrusted. Just-deserts punishments signal that leaders’ sanctions are aimed only at subordinates who have broken rules in the past instead of those who may potentially break rules in the future. This reduces the likelihood that subordinates who have not yet broken any rules feel distrusted. Thus, a leader’s lack of trust and resulting unjust punishments may lead subordinates to feel distrusted.

Subordinates’ reactions to feeling distrusted

Whether subordinates feel distrusted by their leader is important for their willingness to cooperate. Subordinates are motivated to see themselves as trustworthy (Steele, 1988) and want leaders to trust them (Tyler & Lind, 1992). The belief that a leader lacks trust may serve to motivate behavior that actually validates this lack of trust when subordinates react against the leader. That is, when subordinates view a punishment as unjust, they feel distrusted. This perception is often sufficient to make subordinates feel poorly treated, thereby undermining their willingness to cooperate with the leader—in particular for those who perceive the leader’s distrust as illegitimate and unfair (e.g., third-party subordinates who have not engaged in misconduct). Indeed, a perceived lack of trust may seem disrespectful, because being trusted by a leader signals that one is respected and valued (Dunning, Anderson, Schlosser, Ehlebracht, & Fethchenhauer, 2014). Perceiving a lack of trust from a leader may therefore foster negative attitudes towards the leader (as he or she violates a norm), increase negative emotions such as anger (Higgins, 1987), decrease trust in the leader (as he or she has demonstrated to not trust you), and decrease subordinates’ willingness to comply with rules. Some research provides evidence for this. Mooijman et al. (2017) and Tyler et al. (2015) show that not feeling trusted by an authority figure undermines people’s willingness to cooperate with this authority as it undermines the ‘social bond’ and quality of the relationship between the authority and people; even slight signs of distrust from others (i.e., when senders in a Trust Game do not sent their full endowment) can decrease trust in others and increase interpersonal retaliation (Pillutla, Malhotra, & Murnighan, 2003). Thus, unjust punishments may lead subordinates to engage in more misconduct by making them feel distrusted.

Alternatively, feeling distrusted may also motivate behavior aimed at restoring trust by cooperating with the leader. Subordinates that cooperate show to the leader that they are trustworthy and that unjust punishments are unnecessary and unwarranted. Although little research has investigated this possibility, feeling distrusted could motivate cooperation, conditional on subordinates being able to demonstrate their trustworthiness to leaders. Indeed, when subordinates are able to “disprove” the notion that they cannot be trusted by demonstrating cooperative behaviors, they might be willing to do so. Subordinates’ moral self-image and the perceived legitimacy of the leader may play a key role in this process. Subordinates that are

motivated to restore their reputation as a trustworthy person and view the leader as a legitimate source for this reaffirmation may cooperate more. Although leaders might thus be inclined to punish unjustly and make subordinates feel distrusted, the degree to which subordinates react with antagonism may depend on whether leaders allow subordinates to restore their trustworthiness. We believe this to be an interesting area of future research, in particular because it suggests that leaders can turn a potentially negative event (subordinates reacting against punishments) into a positive one (subordinates reaffirming their trustworthiness with cooperative behavior). Of course, whether subordinates see leaders as a legitimate source to reaffirm their trustworthiness depends on the quality of the relationship between leaders and subordinates, with unjust punishments potentially damaging this relationship. Future research should investigate these possibilities.

Summary

Leaders use unjust punishments due to their lack of trust, which is caused by high-power leaders experiencing low levels of status. Subordinates can accurately infer leaders’ distrust from their reliance on unjust punishments. Although feeling distrusted can both undermine as well as promote cooperation, current research has not yet demonstrated if subordinates cooperate more with leaders when they feel distrusted. Future research could investigate how leaders can leverage subordinates’ distrust as a positive tool to promote cooperation—leaders that provide the opportunity for subordinates to reaffirm their trustworthiness might transform them into cooperative and compliant subordinates.

The perpetuation of unjust punishments

Our analysis so far suggests that there are inherent risks in leaders’ punishments. That is, leaders’ ability to punish in a just manner may be limited: their unjust punishments can make subordinates feel distrusted and their punishments may undermine subordinates’ motivation to work for the leader, cooperate with the leader, and stick to organizational rules. We also discussed how feeling distrusted could foster more cooperative behavior from subordinates through increasing the need to reaffirm their trustworthiness to the leader. And one might argue that even if unjust punishments promote misconduct, leaders could “self-correct” as soon as they are faced with the possible negative consequences of their unjust punishments (e.g., lower observed rates of cooperation from subordinates). Leaders may, in other words, reduce their reliance on unjust punishments as a consequence of observing less cooperative behaviors, thus making unjust punishment a short-lived phenomenon. This is indeed possible, since leaders can sometimes recognize the negative impact of their own punishment behavior. At least as likely, however, is the possibility that organizational leaders can double down on their use of unjust punishment in the face of antagonistic reactions from subordinates, as detailed in the next section.

Leaders’ responses to subordinates’ antagonistic reactions

Leaders’ response to subordinates’ antagonistic reactions may reflect their initial response to the misconduct. When subordinates react antagonistically to an unjust punishment, leaders may revert back to their initial punishment behavior. They may punish severely to deter misconduct, even though this response caused subordinates’ antagonistic reactions in the first place. Of course, this logic is predicated on the notion that leaders are either unaware of the reason why subordinates react antagonistically or do not care enough to change their punishment behavior. There are reasons to believe that this can often be the case. Having power has

been linked to a decreased motivation to see the world from other people's perspectives as well as a decreased motivation to be concerned about others (Blader et al., 2016; Galinsky et al., 2006; Van Kleef et al., 2008). This suggests that powerful leaders are unlikely to become aware of the fact that misconduct may be a consequence of their own behavior. Instead, they may attribute it to subordinates' faulty characters (Van Prooijen et al., 2014) and provide punishment justifications accordingly. Leaders' response to misconduct may, then, create additional feelings of injustice and foster further misconduct from subordinates, which in turn evokes even more unjust punishment from the leader, and so on. This negative feedback loop is problematic as it is potentially a self-reinforcing and self-perpetuating cycle, leading to a downward spiral of unjust punishment and misconduct.

In addition, punishment may also become behavior that leaders come to rely on as a reputation-management strategy in the face of escalating antagonistic reactions from subordinates. Even though leaders' punishments trigger more misconduct and uncooperative behavior, it signals to the leader and others that he/she is "taking the appropriate actions" and trying to create stability and order. Of course, this phenomenon depends on the normative framework from which leaders operate. Punishment may become behavior that leaders come to depend upon as a signal of their reputation when punishment is seen as an appropriate response to misconduct. For instance, leaders may become aware that their punishments create more misconduct but feel forced to keep punishing, as not punishing could undermine their reputation and legitimacy in the eyes of upper management. Some examples of this can be seen in the "law-and-order" policies of politicians that crack down on crime, even when such an approach is not always effective (e.g., stop-and-frisk, three-strike rules; Mooijman et al., 2015; Mooijman et al., 2017; Tyler & Boeckmann, 1997; Tyler, Goff, & MacCoun, 2015).

Summary

An important question for leaders is how to promote cooperation and prevent misconduct. As far back as the 17th and 18th century, philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes (1651/1996) and Jeremy Bentham (1789/1988) already argued that—because people are inclined to break rules—leaders should use punishments. To this day, many corporations and government institutions use harsh punishments to deter employees and citizens from breaking their rules (Kirchler et al., 2014). But punishments are often perceived as unjust by subordinates and can thereby foster antagonistic reactions. In the current paper, we reviewed evidence on how power and status can cause leaders to punish in ways that are perceived as unjust by subordinates and how this can cause leaders to double down on their use of unjust punishments. We also guided future research on the topic of punishment in organizations by pointing to areas of research that need more attention, and we provided suggestions on how leaders might transform their unjust punishments from having negative consequences (e.g., lower rates of cooperation from subordinates) to positive consequences (e.g., higher rates of cooperation from subordinates).

The current analysis is important for a number of reasons. First, no theoretical model had yet proposed integrating the determinants (e.g., power, status), process (e.g., trust) and consequences (e.g., misconduct) of leaders' punishments, even though research has been conducted on both the determinants and consequences of leaders' punishments. The advantage of the analysis conducted here is that it provides an understanding of the interrelationships between the determinants and consequences of leaders' punishments. Such an analysis is useful for understanding behavioral change in organizations. An integrative understanding of leaders' punishment behavior and subsequent effectiveness, for instance,

sheds light onto why informing leaders about how they should punish does not always directly translate into behavioral change. Even if leaders are explicitly told that they should justify their punishments as an attempt to achieve just deserts, and not as an attempt to deter rule breaking, their power might still edge them towards severe punishments and reliance on deterrence as a punishment goal. Leaders' punishments, in other words, are not just isolated phenomenon but, rather, are also influenced by both the hierarchy in which leaders are imbedded and subordinates' subsequent reactions to punishments. While previous research on organizational punishment has primarily examined the consequences of organizational punishment for subordinates' attitudes, emotions, and behaviors (Treviño, 1992), we would argue that organizational punishment should be studied in a more integrated and dynamic manner. The current paper provides an early framework for integrating our understanding of organizational punishment from both the perspective of the leader and the subordinate.

Additional directions for future research

Punishment in the organizational context

Our theorizing suggests that unjust punishments can be self-perpetuating. Such an implication is interesting because leaders are frequently told to achieve behavioral change through creating a shared vision and providing psychological safety and inspiration to others (e.g., transformational leadership). However, leaders regularly have to enforce rules with punishments, as inspirational leadership is not always sufficient for promoting rule compliance (Wyld, 2013). The principles outlined in the present analysis suggests that punishing is wrought with difficulties and risks. We believe that understanding punishment in organizations using social psychological concepts is useful and will lead to a practical understanding of what leaders should and should not do in order to achieve behavioral change. However, most recent research on punishment is experimental and conducted in laboratories. Although this generates useful insights, we believe that future research should aim to test some of the predictions mentioned in the current paper within organizations. Admittedly, we painted a somewhat simplified picture of power, status, punishment, and misconduct in organizations. Organizations are complex and multidimensional, with a great need for interventions to stimulate good behavior and prevent bad behavior from occurring (Brief & Smith-Crowe, 2016). Perhaps as a consequence, punishment behavior within organizations and institutions is a much less studied topic. Examining ethical misconduct and punishments in organizations is more difficult, time-consuming, and expensive than conducting laboratory experiments. Yet, if we are to understand punishment in its organizational context, social scientists should also study punishment in that context. A good example is a recent study by Stefani, King, & Verona (2015) who studied punishment behavior amongst 500 gourmet chefs in Italy. They found that both retributive (e.g., just deserts) and calculative (e.g., deterrence) motives played a role in punishment behavior amongst chefs, complementing previous psychological research on the psychology of punishment motives.

Without testing the impact of power and status on punishment in the organizational context, we only base our understanding of punishment on the general principles that are derived from social psychological studies. We believe that the theorizing in the present analysis is likely to materialize in organizations (e.g., high-power and low-status increasing harsh punishments and fostering reliance on unjust punishments), yet the lack of organizational studies prevents us from drawing other conclusions. For instance, power is a complex construct that is often simplified and power

can be construed in different ways (e.g., personal opportunity versus responsibility; De Wit et al., 2017). It is still an open question whether a different power construal impacts leaders' punishment preferences, but it may be the case that feeling more responsible towards one's own subordinates could attenuate the degree to which leaders use punishments that are perceived as unjust. For example, after the recent financial crisis in 2008 some financial institutions hired rule-compliance officers who were given the power to oversee bank manager's decisions, create rules, and guidelines, and enforce rules with punishments (Treviño et al., 2014). The current theorizing suggests that the power that such individuals have may make them less effective at using punishments, although feeling responsible for the well-being of employees might counteract the negative effects of power. Depending on how their power is framed (e.g., enforce rules versus being responsible for employees' welfare) we can expect power to increase or decrease reliance on severe and unjust punishments.

The present analysis also suggests that interventions aimed at fostering feelings of status amongst organizational leaders may sometimes counteract the negative impact that power may have on punishment behaviors. These recommendations are consistent with other work on the impact of feeling respected and admired (e.g., Blader & Yu, 2017; Blader & Chen, 2016), yet surprisingly little research has investigated how leaders can be made to feel more respected and admired at work. In other words, how do we generate feelings of respect amongst power holders in organizations? Due to the focus of status research on social psychological experiments, there is no clear answer to this question even though understanding such interventions seems important. One fruitful avenue for future research is to uncover the organizational determinants of subjective feelings of status. Lastly, the present analysis has emphasized the deterrence versus just deserts dichotomy that has been used by most previous research on punishment goals and motives (e.g., Carlsmith et al., 2002). Yet, if leaders are concerned about loyalty to the organization, or maintaining respect for authorities as well as the hierarchical structure of the organization itself (including respect for the organization's founders, history, and traditions; Graham et al., 2013), they may be more likely to harshly punish violators, but yet do so in an in-and-of-itself deontological fashion with little regard for deterrence consequences (Koleva, Beall, & Graham, in press). Thus, the organizational context might introduce punishment goals and punishment justifications that have not been studied before.

Conclusion

What causes leaders to punish others unjustly? And why might leaders keep punishing others unjustly, even when it increases workplace misconduct? In this paper, we reviewed evidence on what causes leaders to punish in ways that are likely to be perceived as unjust by subordinates. We also reviewed evidence on how this perception fosters misconduct from subordinates and how this might create a self-perpetuating feedback loop—that is, leaders being more likely to punish in an unjust manner when subordinates engage in misconduct, but subordinates' misconduct also arising in part from these unjust punishments. We discussed how leader-subordinate distrust may be at the heart of this negative cycle and how organizations may counteract this process. We highlighted research areas that have received little attention and drew up an agenda for future research, all in the hope that the current paper inspires more scholarship on the topic of punishment.

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